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SUBJECT: GHAZI SULEIMAN: US SUDAN POLICY "SATISFIES MORAL
OUTRAGE BUT YOU HAVE TO GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY"

REF: KHARTOUM 1938

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM) National Assembly leader and human rights advocate Ghazi Suleiman sees the SPLM as almost certainly running with and not against the National Congress Party in 2009 elections, criticized US Sudan policy as "too clumsy," described power in Sudan as still military in nature and ridiculed the concept of Sudan as a real state. End summary.

BOOZY, SECULAR GENERALS AND GETTING YOUR HANDS DIRTY

¶2. (C) Once rightly lauded as the "godfather of human rights in Sudan," lawyer/politician Ghazi Suleiman expounded to CDA Fernandez on December 14 his very idiosyncratic view of the political situation in Sudan. Originally a man of the political left (like many in the SPLM) Suleiman was imprisoned 18 times by successive Northern governments, the last time before the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Probably sincere in describing SPLM founder John Garang "as the greatest figure in all of Sudanese history," he is also a shameless self-promoter and slippery politico who angered SPLM leaders by attempting to take over the party's leadership in the National Assembly in the vacuum caused by SPLM Deputy SG Yassir Arman's 7 month absence in the U.S.

¶3. (C) Suleiman started by criticizing US policy in Sudan describing it as "too clumsy, satisfying your moral outrage about Darfur but not influencing events on the ground enough." He noted that "even though you helped bring it about," the Americans don't appreciate how revolutionary and sweeping the CPA is and how essential it is for transforming Sudan, and even achieving peace in Darfur. Ghazi saw American policy as internally contradictory, seeking to punish a pariah regime and then build up the peace and transformation brought about through the same regime at the same time. "There is no excuse for getting your hands dirty and engaging to transform things in Sudan," he said but the need to blast Sudan over its crimes in Darfur "paralyzes" American flexibility. CDA assured Ghazi that the US is deeply engaged in supporting the CPA, for example the Secretary just held a CPA meeting on December 5 and the President met with Salva Kiir only a few weeks ago. Ghazi countered that these meetings are good, "but deeper engagement and money will get you everything you want in Sudan."

¶4. (C) Suleiman described much of the civilian leadership of (Northern) Sudan as "just window dressing." Real political power today is wielded by three people: President Al-Bashir, Minister of the Presidency Bakri Hassan Saleh, and Minister

of Defense Abdelrahim Muhammad Hussein. All three are generals and don't correspond to the traditional tale of political power in Sudan controlled by three small Nile Valley tribes (Danagala, Jaalayin and Shaygiyya). "Bakri and Abdelrahim are Nubians, hard-drinking secular generals" and even Al-Bashir is Shaygiyya but also "part African (supposedly Fellata, who migrated originally from West Africa). These three have purged the Army of Islamist generals and are relatively pragmatic. Suleiman described the Army as "weak militarily but strong politically" noting that most of the crimes in Darfur were committed by irregular forces, militias and "also units tied to your friend Salah Ghosh (NISS Director General who is also a 'relative secularist/pragmatist but friendly to the Americans from a nationalist perspective')." .

BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

15. (C) For all its faults, the SAF was still a national institution (except in the South, of course, "where it has ceased to exist") but there was "no such thing as Sudan, Sudan is a weak state." It is so large and lacks a real national identity. The only vision that encompassed a sophisticated view of what Sudan could and should be, was the CPA because of John Garang. Suleiman noted that, like many other African countries, Sudan was 'too tribal.' People should be more mixed and marry outside their tribe but that generally doesn't happen so the focus is on the family/clan and tribal grouping.

16. (C) The tribal dimension certainly exists in the South and Suleiman warned about "pushing anti-corruption in the South

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too hard." It is a natural African practice of taking care of one's extended family and tribe, especially given that unemployment is high in the South and job prospects are dim. There is no real source of wealth outside the State (97% of revenues coming from oil proceeds) and the development community, "so aim for greater transparency and honesty but don't overdue it because corruption buys social peace in the South right now." CDA responded that he understood the concept but if corruption disrupts development and the provision of a "peace dividend" for the South then it carries a high social cost and can destabilize the SPLM's hold on power.

17. (C) Although Yassir Arman has taken the opposite view (reftel), Suleiman believes that in the end the SPLM will make a pact of some sort with the NCP for the 2009 elections. "The danger of running against them and splitting the CPA constituency" is too high. It is the only way to ensure that the provisions of the CPA remain intact and are implemented and so the SPLM (and international community) are "stuck with the devil we know, Al-Bashir and company." In the end, he thought, dealing with the NCP was simple because "they are no longer that ideological, just a corrupt oligarchy that wants power." He did see the SPLM as pushing for a more equitable distribution of power, for example, "a 50/50 or 50/40 split" in the National Assembly as opposed to the current 52 percent for the NCP and 28 percent for the SPLM. Perhaps the CPA could be amended to have a Prime Minister (for the SPLM) under Al-Bashir "but many in the SPLM would even oppose this because they prefer to have the CPA untouched by revisions."

18. (C) Comment: Ghazi Suleiman is a controversial figure within the SPLM with some seeing him as too dishonest and, despite being in his late 60s, too politically ambitious. Despite his much touted closeness to John Garang, he is not part of the SPLM inner circle and Northerners like Arman and Mansur Khalid are much more trusted by Salva Kiir. We generally agree with his analysis of the CPA and of the reality of a weak Sudanese state and of corruption. His

description of the Al-Bashir/Bakri/Abdelrahim troika is interesting and true in the sense that both generals have an essentially personal and military loyalty to Al-Bashir that has nothing to do with political Islam or the NCP. But because Al-Bashir is not a micro-manager and prefers to delegate, officials like VP Ali Osman Taha and noxious party leader Nafie Ali Nafie have a lot of authority even if Al-Bashir reserves the right of final approval. Both of these civilians played an important and probably baleful role in Darfur. End comment.
FERNANDEZ